



**Town of Fairfield • Registrar of Voters Office**  
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Dear Chairmen Jutila and Cassano, Ranking Members Smith and McLaughlin, and members of the Government Administration and Elections committee,

My name is Matt Waggner, and I'm a Registrar of Voters from the town of Fairfield. I'd like to testify today on a few bills, primarily **HB 5300, "An Act Concerning Regional Consolidation of Certain Functions of Election Administration."**

Regionalizing elections is a concept that returns each session to this committee, and I feel that it's important for those of us in the election community to share our perspective on what problems regionalization can solve – or create.

First, it's important to recognize that Connecticut runs extremely lean elections: while nationally, local jurisdictions spend about 1% of their budgets on voter registration and election administration, Connecticut towns spend a small fraction of this amount, commonly less than 1/10th of 1% of local budgets. We hire fewer people, pay them less, serve more people in fewer polling places, do less voter outreach and registration, and in most towns, are available to the public for far fewer hours than election offices around the country.

We expect a massive skill set, flawless execution, and instant results from offices that are either run by volunteers or are severely understaffed relative to any other government function you can name. I find that comparing election administration to tax collection – at the local or at the state level – is instructive for examining our priorities.

What I want to convey here is that regionalization or consolidation in elections is not something you should see as a tool to reduce costs: we Registrars serve our communities by providing the best services possible with the resources available, and proposals that lead to de-staffing elections will lead directly to reduced services.

At the same time, I think that there is a growing recognition among state leaders that we could be doing more to serve our voters, and whether that takes the form of a long-term overhaul to bring election administration into a civil service-style system or narrowly targeting resources to solve specific problems, I think we should applaud anyone who wants to improve election services at the ground level. Some strategies for expanding services using a regional model that I'd recommend examining would be:

- Basic voter registration portability could be achieved by allowing new towns of residence to accept DMV address changes under 9-19i and canvass changes under 9-32 as proof of residence, eliminating inactive lists and the need to track and re-register voters whenever they move across town lines.
- Designating Secretary of the State staff – already empowered to enter polling places – as "admitting officials" under 9-17a would help resolve the crush of mail-in applications arriving near the deadline in their office, which are now sorted and mailed to the towns but commonly received after the final lists are printed.

- Allowing opt-in regionalization among small towns (similar to regional school districts) could increase the number of full-time administrators, better serving the public while increasing the amount of training and expertise that these officials receive.

These ideas aren't exhaustive, but I do think they represent ways to improve our levels of service and professionalism that would both gain respect among current Registrars and set the table for regional administration should you decide that a that a commitment to uniform election administration statewide is a worthy investment in years to come.

I would also like to add my voice in support of **HB 6113 – “An Act Expanding the Use of Absentee Ballots.”** As a town with a significant number of commuters, I can tell you that our voters experience a lot of confusion around the “absent during all the hours of voting” language, with some attempting to return their ballots on their way to work, others voting by absentee ballot when they aren't permitted to do so, and still others who wind up stuck in traffic or a train that lose their vote when they can't get home in time. As we generally have neither the resources nor the desire to track the physical location of absentee voters on Election Day, this proposal will eliminate a disenfranchising hurdle from our system and, I believe, bring it more in line with the values (that casting one vote on your own behalf shouldn't be a criminal act) that voters already hold.

Finally, I would like to caution against the provisions of **SB 829, “An Act Concerning Persons who Assist Others in Registering as Electors.”** As I mentioned earlier, there is very little “official,” proactive registration work conducted by towns at present, and we rely on volunteers, political campaigns, state agencies, and organizations such as the League of Women Voters to reach out to the community and register people who aren't familiar with our system.

Not only would it be impossible to track which applications mailed to us came from registered versus unregistered voter registration solicitors (even if we restricted the supply of applications, activists could simply use Federal forms and send them directly to the state), a similar restriction implemented in Florida had a severe chilling effect on the registration work of organizations such as the LWV, and ordinary citizens could be penalized for assisting family members or neighbors with their forms. In the aftermath of a close election, such assistance could be targeted for selective enforcement by political operatives, which would be an unfortunate spectacle.

I'm aware of the problems with campaigns strategically delivering applications to secure an information advantage over their opponents, but I hope that this problem could be addressed more narrowly by requiring applications to be submitted within a defined period after being collected, providing for postage-paid applications to limit the need for campaigns to handle completed forms, or updating forms and training materials to educate both campaigns and new voters of their rights and responsibilities with regard to these documents.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to testify today.